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THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN

Of the 875 million illiterates in the world, two-thirds are women. This is the conclusion reached by UNICEF'S Report on The State of the World's Children. This year's Report deals with education and its effect on children's health and development. Sheldon Shaeffer, Chief of the Education Section at UNICEF, discusses the main aspects of the Report.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

a billion adults will enter the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names. Without even basic education, chances of improving their lives and escaping poverty via employment and economic mobility are severely limited. Globalization is widening the gap between rich and poor. UNICEF, the United Nations Children Fund has recently released its Annual Report called "The State of the World's Children". This year, the Report focused on education and its effect on children's health and development while outlining the life threatening consequences children face as a result of poor schooling.

Our guest today is Sheldon Shaeffer, Chief of the Education Section of UNICEF. Joining me to talk with Mr. Shaeffer is Judy Lessing of *Radio New Zealand* and Minh Vo of *Christian Science Monitor*.

Mr. Shaeffer, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Schaeffer, as so often with reports about development or lack of development in the poorer countries of the world, this report on education is the theme of the State of the World's Children Report is pretty depressing reading. Of course as always, there is some more encouraging aspects but on the whole it makes rather depressing reading. What is UNICEF doing to try to improve this education picture and how successful have you been judging from the report, I mean, success is still rather limited. How do you appraise the situation?

SCHAEFFER: Well, first I'd like to say that I think one of the important things is not to be missed in the report is at least partly the optimistic tone of it. It starts off with a fairly pessimistic review of the lack of progress, if you will, the lack of fulfilment of the commitment which many countries made in 1990 at the World Summit for Children. But then it goes on to talk about what it calls an education revolution which is really conditions or elements which are in place now that there not so much in place, or so well known ten years ago. And I think it tries that in fact we know quite a bit more than we

used to, we have good examples of things in place and not it's a matter of using more resources and more will to move forward. Now UNICEF in that process is working at different levels. At one level, it's attempting with advocacy, with governments to try to encourage more funding of education as well as other social programmes. It is try to encourage governments in terms of policies, to adopt policies which encourage more, greater access to education for the hard to reach, greater quality of education and especially a greater focus on girls' education.

LITTLEJOHNS: But a lot of things really haven't change very much in the ten years that you are talking about, I mean, particularly in the case of women and girls. Of the 130 million children aged between six and eleven in the developing world who are not at school, approximately 73 million, almost two-thirds are girls, although this was a priority.

SCHAEFFER: Yes, that's probably one of the bigger failings of the whole decade, if you will, that not more has been able to be achieved. I think one reason for that is that early on in the decade there wasn't as much knowledge about what could be done. It was felt that simply advocating for more girls' education, or telling people that their girls, their daughters should be educated would do the trick and now we know that isn't the case. So now I think there are 10 or 12 or so interventions, kinds of things that we know work better, whether it would be hiring of more female teachers, whether it would be actual subsidies for families who have girls that are not in school, whether it would be simply building schools closer to the homes of girls. We know these things work and I would guess that now in the next measurement of progress which would be really the year 2000, that there will be considerably more evidence of some success.

LITTLEJOHNS: But isn't it the only problem of barriers created by cultures of religions.

SCHAEFFER: Yes, that is part of it...

LITTLEJOHNS: And UNICEF can't do very much about that...

SCHAEFFER: No, we can try a bit to work through some of the traditional leaders. In some countries we work closely with religious leaders to try to convince them

of the importance of girls' education. We have taken religious leaders from one country who have agreed with that to another to kind of demonstrate to their peers why, in fact, it might be useful to educate more girls. I think this is a slow process, a lot of it is done on modelling and to the extent that you have more girls going into teaching who serve as good role models for girls in school. I think that will also lead to greater enrolment for girls, but that's may be a 10 year process to have it work.

LESSING: I wonder, there is a strong theme, and it's not just in your report, that education is a really important pillar for bringing people out of poverty, and yet poverty keeps children out of education. How do you address that sort of paradox?

SCHAEFFER: Well it is a vicious circle in many ways and I think one of the ways is to try to simply ensure that their is more of an opportunity for education. A real opportunity for education and that means not simply a school close by, but a school that people think is actually doing something useful for their children and a school in which the people actually think they have a stake or that they have a role. More and more education is not being provided solely by the central state, but instead, through local community based organizations and I think that is making people within a community feel a bit more ownership and giving greater value to education. So that's a way to break the vicious cycle, that even pour families because they feel some role in the whole process are more and more willing, it seems, to put their children into schooling. And one hopes that as a result of that, the children in fact will gain some of the skills that they need to break that cycle. On the other hand, there are also more conscious schemes of subsidization, scholarships, fee reductions, other kinds of things that can be done to try to help the children of the poor to get into school itself.

LESSING: The children of the poor though, if they are going to school at all, are we more likely, as Michael was talking about, find that they are boys and not girls?

SCHAEFFER: That is often the case I'm afraid, and that happens especially at times of crisis, the economic crisis in Asia is a case in point where not only the assumption but more and more evidence is showing that when families have to limit the number of children in school, usually the girls are taken out first. So that is in fact a problem and I

think that one of the things that is being done in a place like Indonesia, for example, is to try to target especially families with girls in school to say look, there are very strong reasons to keep your girls in school, we will, governments, donor agencies help to provide just enough money that you can keep your girls in school, that's happening more.

VO: That's an interesting point because I think that now with the economic malaise that's hit Asia and is spreading over to Latin America and other regions, how are you going to address the long-term problems of poor families not having the money to send their kids to school and having the need of having their kids work at home or in the fields. It seems as if education is a long-term investment, you don't really get the benefits immediately. Nothing is tangible immediately, whereas, giving people money for food or having children work can have immediate benefits, so how can you go about and convince families to look at the long-term benefits?

SCHAEFFER: One thing that's being done in Indonesia, and this is a joint programme of the Asian Development Bank and UNICEF and the world Bank, is to launch first of all a campaign, national campaign with television stars and all kinds of very exciting messages to families saying - try to do what you can to keep your children in school. The crisis is here, it will last a while but if the child loses this chance, if the child drops out now, three or four years from now when things get better there won't be much chance that the child will go back in.

VO: Do you measure the impact of those campaigns? I mean, if you are a poor family and you see those ads, and you see those television stars, you think - oh that's great, I wish my kid could be like those people on TV, and have an education, but the reality is that I don't have the money. I don't have the time.

SCHAEFFER: But that s, the campaign is the first part of it, and the second part is quite large scale provision of subsidies to students and block grants to schools and with Indonesian money as well as donor money, a large percentage of children in junior secondary school, which is probably the hardest hit and even primary schools are being met by small amounts of money but just enough to probably be able to pay, not for fees which are being reduced in many cases but for the other expenses of education. Block

grants are being given to schools also so that the schools don't have to ask so much money from the families themselves. So it's an attempt to try to do a little bit of both, one through advocacy and the campaign to get parents willing to listen to the possibility of keeping children in school and then with some financial incentives trying to get them. And again it's getting over that, maybe two or three or four hump, until things we hope get better, but I think it's very important.

VO: Given the problems that Indonesia is facing now, will you expect the Government of Indonesia to be playing a smaller part financially and becoming more dependent on UNICEF and donor agencies?

SCHAEFFER: I think it's hard to say, I am not sure what's going to happen, it depends on what happens in the elections next year and what happens with the economic crisis as we speak.

VO: Well, it's not going to lift any time soon, or at least not for the next year. We might be over the worse part of the economic crisis but I don't Indonesia is going to suddenly have a lot more money in its coffers, so is UNICEF prepared to give more money?

SCHAEFFER: We have been ourselves, we have just gone through a kind of mid-term review of the programme there, which happens every two or three years and have decided, in fact, to put a lot more of the resources available into the basic social programmes of nutrition, basic health care and education, so that's one example.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Schaeffer, I spoke earlier about the cultural and religious obstacles to the education of girls and adult women, if it comes to that. What do you do in the case of a country like Afghanistan, where the Taliban are determined that women and girls should not have equality with men and boys. That's they can't do much about that.

SCHAEFFER: That's a very difficult question which has vexed us, I think, for a long time. For a while it was possible to fund schools for girls in homes, and that's one thing that we were in fact doing. We were trying to help people to set up home schools that girls could in fact go to. These were subsequently also forbidden by the government and UNICEF has basically had to say that we will not simply fund an education system that takes care only of boys. So that's what we have had to say which we have done very

reluctantly, but I think that's a common stance more or less that many of agencies have taken.

LESSING: Minh was talking about children who may have to work in the fields or help their parents out in some way, does UNICEF, are you able to point to any programmes where these working children, even though we might wish that they might be in school at the time, can somehow be accommodated so that they can do some work and get an education?

SCHAEFFER: Yes, that's, what we are thinking of is in terms of non-formal approaches to basic education, not so much a dichotomy of formal verses non-formal schooling or education itself, but how can one achieve basic education, in some cases through more formal structures, like formal schools, in some cases through more non-formal. And that could include in some cases schools in factory settings, usually seen as a transition, trying to get children completely out of a factory setting, especially if it's a hazard setting. But schools within factories or schools which can adapt their calendars or their time-tables to an agricultural cycle or to a daily economic calendar that families might face. So trying to have schools, or alternative basic education programmes when children can come in the evening, they can for a fewer number of hours per day, they can come for a fewer number of days per week in order to get that basic education. It's difficult often because bureaucracies are often not flexible enough to adapt those kinds of processes. It can also be difficult if families feel it's a second class education and want a first class education for their children which they think only the school represents, but it can be done, it has been done.

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VO: Following up on that question, I think I saw in the report some paragraphs about radio and using that as a tool of educating children, now are there certain segments of population or certain areas of the world where that's going to be probably the primary tool of education children?

SCHAEFFER: One of the major things that UNICEF is focusing on now,

especially based on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which is talking about reaching all children, so the idea of 80 percent or 90 percent being enough is no longer acceptable to us. We have to really focus on that last five or ten percent and one tool to do that is some of the new technologies, whether it's radio which has proven to be in fact certainly more cost efficient than education has been, whether it might even be some of the more modern technologies. I have a colleague working with me here in New York who is trying to experiment with low cost Internet communications even in fairly rural schools of the Philippines, schools that have some access to electricity and telephone lines. What might be done in terms of sharing information across schools. That's something that we are also trying to do but focusing very much on trying to reduce, trying to use technology to reduce rather than increase disparities. The report talks a lot about, if you the dangers of technology to increase disparities so the challenge for us is to see how we can use the technologies instead to reduce those disparities.

VO: And these technologies would be used as a supplement to the existing education system or is it going to be used in some cases as the sole means of providing education.

SCHAEFFER: It would be, in most cases, I think a supplement. In fact, what you might find is a remote, isolated school which exists as a school that supervisors can only infrequently visit. There might not be enough text books, the teacher hasn't been well trained and that's where you have radio lessons coming into the school to supplement it both in terms of teacher training and for the children themselves.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Schaeffer, Secretary-General Kofi Annan is quite preoccupied these days about the problems of children in conflict, areas of conflict, including child soldiers. Is UNICEF able to do anything about their educational needs?

SCHAEFFER: Well, certainly in terms of children in conflict. We have recently gone through an exercise in UNICEF which has raised the importance of emergency contexts in UNICEF programming, and we're talking in fact, now not only of the kind of hard emergencies that get into television but the 40 or so countries which are suffering some kind of instability including countries like Indonesia. And how does

UNICEF programme more flexibly and more usefully in countries that are changing so rapidly and so unexpectedly. So there are mechanisms, there are ways in which education can assess first what the problems are. If you have a sudden hurricane as in Central America, you can assess the problem and then if needed, working with partners very often can get into that area's schools, there might be tent schools, what we call edukits, which are the basic requirements, the kind of physical supplies needed for education and the kind of teacher training and support that is necessary. Child soldiers is a more difficult problem, we are working at higher levels of the government, trying to at least get children demobilized and then to provide this kind of non-formal, often catch up, second chance education for the children who are maybe already 12, 14, 16 years old and they have never been to school.

LESSING: Mr. Schaeffer something is bothering me, we're talking a great deal about what UNICEF can do and as an international organization, of course there is a lot you can do. But education, when you come right down to it, something that has to be dealt with in each country and each community. What is the role for say, a central government in all of this?

SCHAEFFER: Well, we work with central governments and we can't do anything unless the central governments have agreed that we do it. We work out country programmes with central governments and with other donors who are cooperating. So it's really the central governments who are setting up the plans with our assistance. We are trying to ensure as much as possible that the central governments are recognizing and working with actors, first lower down the system, so it's not only central governments at the top but also more and more through processes of decentralization, working with governments, lower levels of the government also.

LESSING: To local governmental towns or villages...

SCHAEFFER: Yes, that's very much the case. So much so that in some countries we have a large number of activities where funds go directly to the city mayors, to the cities themselves or with other actors in civil society working outside of the government, the non-governmental organizations and others. So I think UNICEF sees at

least one of its major advantages because it has a presence in almost every country in the world, is the ability to work closely with governments, but then through those governments with other, through those central governments with other partners lower down the system and out of the system itself.

LESSING: Is there a shortage around the world of really good teachers?

SCHAEFFER: Yes, there is. Some countries have too many and some have too few. I think the important word in your sentence is good teachers, there are a large number of teachers who are working very hard under extremely difficult circumstances but they don't have as much training, they don't have as much skill or competence as they should have. So again the idea of trying to develop at the in-service level, that even more often at the pre-service level, ways in which teachers can improve their quality, ways in which teachers can help each other. We start with the assumption that teachers already know a lot, they are not empty vessels. They've had experience, they know something and what they often need to do is just to be able to share that knowledge with other teachers and to get more information from other teachers about what works. That's the idea of more school-based, locally-based, teacher training, supervision, trying to get schools to identify their own problems and then working with local communities to solve those problems, and one of which of course is raising the quality of teachers.

LITTLEJOHNS: Part of the teaching problem surely is that pay scales tend to be on the low side, even a rich country like the United States, we are always hearing about poorly paid teachers. I guess UNICEF is not able to influence any changes there, is it?

SCHAEFFER: Again at the level of advocacy, we can show to governments what percentage of their education budgets are going for different levels of education, and very often there is a skewing towards higher education. Primary school students don't demonstrate in the streets if the primary school budget is being cut, university students do. And so governments very often will put quite high percentages of budgets into higher education where one might argue, that's the one where your fees should be highest. So one thing is to say to governments, well let's try to look at the budget, let's see how much is going to higher education, secondary and basic. And can we ensure that more money is

going then into basic education of which often 85-90% is for teachers. Another thing is to try using teachers who are not yet fully trained but to get them into the system early on where they don't get a full salary but then work with them to try to build up their skills.

LITTLEJOHNS: Intern teachers?

SCHAEFFER: Yes.

VO: Getting back to something you said earlier, you said that you have to have the consent of the government in order to work in the country. Does that mean that UNICEF is really powerless in areas where, in certain countries where schools are teaching hatred and flaring up old ethnic animosities such as in Bosnia? There are a lot of reports of that going on. What is UNICEF's role in that, is there anything that UNICEF can do?

SCHAEFFER: It can. It isn't completely powerless. It can work to try to develop teacher training programmes, curriculum materials which are in fact based on tolerance, global education, peace education, conflict resolution. Even in countries where the governments themselves might be quite oppressive, there is still quite a bit of scope for operation, central governments don't always in fact, know what might be done by ministries of education, ministries of education might be more willing to allow these things to work. Sometimes we are able to work with non-governmental organizations which the government has agreed to but doesn't look carefully at in terms of what actually is being done. So it is difficult but not impossible and that is in fact, an important part of what... what we are trying to do is to look at curriculum and how to build into curriculum some of the conflict resolution and the messages of learning tolerance, of acceptance, of difference...

VO: You mean to say that you can give your own curriculum and say this is a better curriculum and the schools will say, okay.

SCHAEFFER: No, no. We never do that. We don't have a set curriculum. We try to work with curriculum developers to say, have you thought about the importance of these kinds of issues. Here are some examples you might want to look it where it's done elsewhere.

VO: And that's worked in places like Bosnia.

SCHAEFFER: Yes, we are in the process of...quite a few countries of central and eastern Europe are doing some of these activities as well as elsewhere in the world.

LESSING: Mr. Schaeffer, this all costs money, it doesn't necessarily cost a vast amount, but you know there is a dollar figure on it. Now, there has been a programme, there has been the scheme education for all, there have been numerous UN initiatives which call for some overseas development aid, a particular percentage to go into education. I have seen that this figure has dropped off and then it's coming back a little bit. Where are we with donor countries actually targeting some of their overseas aid for education?

SCHAEFFER: Immediately after the World Conference on Education for All in 1990, there was quite an increase, and some countries have maintained that, others haven't and that's partly because the whole foreign assistance pie has been cut, the absolute amount going to education has gone down. We are optimistic I think now as we get into the new century, and having looked at what several donors are doing, that this is going to be changed. There will be a whole series of end of decade, end of century, end of millennium conferences coming up in the next two years and that will be another opportunity to try to put this on the agenda, many of the multilateral agencies are continuing to put more money. The point is that, and the argument we make is that this isn't an unattainable amount of money. One calculation we've made which other donors have made, similar calculations is perhaps several billion dollars a year over ten years would go a long way to getting every child in school. It might not answer all of the cultural, religious, objections but at least it would answer the economic ones and that's not unattainable when you compare it to the amount of money spent on arms or other kinds of things.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Schaeffer we are running out time, I'd hoped that we might be able to talk a bit about the 250 million working children in the world. I believe that UNICEF has had some success in dealing with children in the carpet industry but alas that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on the edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Sheldon Schaeffer, Chief of the Education Section of

UNICEF. He was interviewed by Judy Lessing of *Radio New Zealand*, and Minh Vo of the *Christian Science Monitor*. I'm Michael Littlejohns, thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.